

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 03607 222222Z

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1004

INFO GOV PAN CANAL

USSOUTHCOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 3607

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, PQ

SUBJ: SQUATTERS IN CANAL ZONE

REF: PANAMA 3238 AND 3605

1. ON TOUR OF INTERIOR WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS I HAD OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE WITH HIM PROBLEM FOR ILLEGAL SQUATTERS IN CANAL ZONE. ARA/PAN IS FULLY AWARE OF THIS KNOTTED PROBLEM FROM REFTEL AND MUCH PREVIOUS REPORTING.

2. GENERAL ASSURED ME THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS AS INTERESTED IN SETTLING THIS MATTER AS WE WERE. HE SAID PANAMA HAD DEEP INTEREST IN PREVENTING ILLEGAL CUTTING OF TREES. HE ALSO AGREED WITH ME THAT WHOLE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUAL FARMERS MOVING INTO ISOLATED AREAS AND CARRYING OUT SLASH-AND-BURN FARMING WAS COUNTER TO HIS OWN PLANS FOR INTEGRATING FARM FAMILIES INTO SMALL COMMUNITIES WHERE THERE WOULD SUFFICIENT POPULATION BASE TO JUSTIFY ORGANIZING OF SOCIAL SERVICES (SCHOOLS, CLINICS, ETC.).

3. TORRIJOS SAID HE THOUGHT PROBLEM COULD BE SOLVED IN FAIRLY SHORT TIME IF WE WORKED TOGETHER. HE WANTED INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM DESIGNATED BY ME TO GET TOGETHER WITH TOP

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PANAMA 03607 222222Z

LEADERS IN NATIONAL GUARD (HE SPECIFICALLY NAMED COL. NORIEGA

AS ONE HE WISHED TO BE INVOLVED). HE SAID KEY TO SOLUTION (AS I REPORTED EARLIER AS MY FIRM BELIEF) WAS THAT PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT TAKE LEAD AND DO MOST OF DIRECT CONTACT WITH FARMERS. UNILATERAL ACTION BY U.S.FORCES OR ZONE POLICE WILL ONLY EXACERBATE SITUATION. HE SAID WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER WITH PANAMANIAN TAKING LEAD IN PERSUASION.

4. GENERAL SAID HE THOUGHT PROBLEM OF CUTTING OF TIMBER COULD BE SOLVED IN THIRTY DAYS. BASIC PLAN FOR LONG-RANGE SETTLEMENT (WHICH HE INDICATED HAD BEEN DEVELOPED BY NORIEGA) WAS TO GRADUALLY MOVE FARMERS OUT OF ZONE BUT IN AREAS ALREADY CLEARED. PERMIT THEM TO PLANT AND TEND FRUIT TREES. QUOTE THEY WON'T CUT DOWN FRUIT TREES UNQUOTE GENERAL SAID. AND MEANTIME, HE SAID, THEY WOULD BE PREVENTED FROM CUTTING DOWN ANY OTHER TREES.

5. I WILL BE DISCUSSING THIS POSSIBLE APPROACH WITH MY COLLEAGES IN PRC. I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER IT IS ANSWER WE SEEK. BUT IT STRIKES ME AS MORE PROMISING THAN ANYTHING ANYONE ELSE HAS COME UP WITH TO DATE.

6. GENERAL SAID HE WOULD CALL ME NEXT WEEK TO INTRODUCE ME TO HIS COLLEAGUES AT TOP LEVEL OF GUARD. WE CAN THEN GO FORWARD WITH PLANS FOR MEETING TO DISCUSS MATTER FURTHER AND TO WORK TOWARD CLOSER COOPERATION.

7. FOR THE PRESENT I FORESEE SETTING UP U.S. GROUP HEADED BY DCM WITH TOP-LEVEL REPS FROM ZONE GOVERNMENT AND SOUTHCOM. JORDEN

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